

**MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
FOREST SERVICE**

**CHURCH CREEK FIRE TOWER INTERPRETATIVE SITE
PROPOSAL IN DORCHESTER COUNTY**



BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT PROPOSAL: The Maryland Forest Service is proposing to establish an interpretative site for the Church Creek Fire Tower. The interpretative site will be comprised of two elements:

- (1) The top section of the original Church Creek Fire Tower, consisting of an approximately 30-foot tower support structure plus 10-foot tower cab, will be installed on the proposed site. Visitors will be able to climb to the top of the structure and enter the cab during designated hours. This will be a significant improvement to visitor access, as public access to the tower cab has been prohibited since the tower was decommissioned from active use in the late 1970s. The cab will be renovated and restored to match historical conditions. The tower support structure will be anchored to the ground using concrete base footings and support guy wires, similar to

the original structure, as designed by an architectural / engineering firm contracted by the department for this purpose.

- (2) An interpretative sign will be placed at the base of the tower explaining the State of Maryland Fire Tower Network and interpreting the historical significance of the network in early wildfire protection and suppression.

PUBLIC BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSAL: Two primary public benefits are intended:

- (1) This proposal will dramatically improve and enhance public understanding of the historical significance of Maryland's Fire Tower Network. Although there are still a handful of fire towers standing in the state, the Church Creek Fire Tower Interpretative Site will be the only complete fire tower site in Maryland (with intact cab and superstructure) specifically used to explain the historical importance of fire towers that will be accessible for the public to visit, creating a unique tourist opportunity for Dorchester County and for the state.
- (2) As this site is within 1-mile of the newly opened Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park and Visitor Center as well as close to Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, this project will add another interesting historical attraction for visitors to experience in Dorchester County.

GENERAL BACKGROUND: This proposal is an extension of a larger project initiated in April 2015 to remove three decommissioned and unused fire towers on Maryland's Eastern Shore. Due to lack of maintenance and non-use, these towers had become public safety concerns. These safety concerns included deteriorated support structures, remote locations away from existing facilities, vandalism and window casing failures during storm events. Of the three towers to be removed, the Church Creek Tower was in the best condition, and, in distinction to the other two towers, the Church Creek Tower was also co-located at an existing department facility.

Following the initial approval of the fire tower removal project through an internal department review, the project went through the State Clearinghouse Review process. As part of the review and approval for the project, the Maryland Forest Service worked closely with the Maryland Historic Trust to retain a Historical Preservation Consultant to document the historical site conditions and significance of the three towers. Additionally, the Maryland Forest Service worked with Maryland Historic Trust to solicit input and comments on the project from interested stakeholders, including the respective planning and zoning offices and county historical societies (Dorchester, Somerset and Wicomico counties), and national stakeholders, including the National Forest Fire Lookout Association. The proposal to establish the Church Creek Fire Tower Interpretative Site was developed as part of this collaborative planning process between the Maryland Forest Service and Maryland Historic Trust with the intention of preserving and restoring the top portion of the Church Creek Fire Tower to provide a unique historical attraction in Dorchester County, allowing visitors to better understand the historical role of the fire towers.